Angles
New Perspectives on the Anglophone World

4 | 2017
Unstable States, Mutable Conditions

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Electronic version
URL: http://journals.openedition.org/angles/1528
DOI: 10.4000/angles.1528
ISSN: 2274-2042

Publisher
Société des Anglicistes de l'Enseignement Supérieur

Electronic reference
Cécile Doustaly, « Museums, the Exhibitionary Complex and State Stability in the Victorian Era », *Angles* [Online], 4 | 2017, Online since 01 April 2017, connection on 02 August 2020. URL : http://journals.openedition.org/angles/1528 ; DOI : https://doi.org/10.4000/angles.1528

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Cécile Doustaly

1 Compared to other European nations, Britain was relatively late in opening free public museums. The British liberal tradition meant that "culture" was not a field whose support was in any sense self-evident, since it was not considered a matter for the State and had been only marginally associated with the monarchy. George III, one of the rare monarchs to be publicly involved in culture, notably for reasons of national prestige, chose to intervene from a safe distance, when resorting to the legal instrument of a Foundation for the creation of the Royal Academy of Arts, a private institution, which became self-sufficient by 1780. In the first half of the 19th century, exhibitions of private collections were popularised by semi-public galleries that had been established through the generosity of patrons — a few aristocrats, but mostly bankers, manufacturers, merchants or representatives of the liberal professionals (Doustaly 2010: 208-12).

2 In 1774, John Wilkes, Mayor of London, one of the early promoters of State support for museums on democratic and nationalist grounds, lobbied in favour of a "truly" public museum, at a time when admission to the British Museum was by ticket only and in small groups, before it eventually opened without restrictions in 1810 (Wilkes 61). In 1832, during parliamentary debates on the question of funding for an appropriately grand building for the National Gallery (created in 1824), the link between museums, social control and State stability emerged through the voice of the Tory Robert Peel (1832), who argued that in times of "political excitement, [and] exacerbation of angry and unsocial feelings", a National Gallery would "contribute [...] to the cementing of the bonds of union between the richest and poorer orders of State." The new building was inaugurated in 1838 in Trafalgar Square (Taylor 27, 51).

3 Little more was planned, in the field of museums, where the general opposition to State funding remained strong. However, the succession of incremental reforms of the

franchise between 1832 and 1884, along with the modernisation of the State and the extension of education and other services, paved the way for the birth of the modern museums. The debate gathered pace, as an increasing number of reformers and philanthropists came to consider the practice of visiting museums to be an effective means of gaining education and social skills. Once the issue came to be taken up in Parliament, the range of policy objectives which could be invoked in the arguments for the support of museums was extended to questions of international trade and prestige. Instead of focusing solely on educational or cultural justifications, the arguments thus took the form of what cultural policy researchers have theorised as an instance of instrumentalism, where culture is promoted for a number of non-cultural ends (Doustaly and Gray). From the desire to democratise culture to the need to civilise the mob or to support the economy, an issue repeatedly taken up was that of the inclusion of the poorer sections of the growing urban population, notably in industrial cities, i.e. a population habitually constructed as constituting the "dangerous classes". On what grounds did supporters make their case, when lobbying government for legislation and funds? Did the practice of going to the museum become a right or a duty of citizens? And who were the real beneficiaries of public and philanthropic interest?

4 This paper focuses on the case made for the support of free public museums during the Victorian era, a case which, in association with a wide array of other objectives, stressed their capacity to encourage political stability through a consolidation of social control. While researchers have developed conflicting views regarding the role of these new public institutions, the periodisation and categorisation of the sources and agents put forward in this article allow us to assess the relevance of the various factors and theories, when studying specific periods and different types of museum. From the 1830s, a first period was marked by campaigns for top-down museum reform, in a context of political instability and the birth of the rational recreation movement. The Great Exhibition of 1851 then heralded an era of greater social stability. Through its unquestionable success, both popular and financial, coupled with the evidence it provided regarding the "good behaviour" of the working classes, it opened the way for an extension and diversification of museums. During the latter part of the Victorian age, some of these new institutions were confronted with controversies related to religion, urbanisation, poverty and the continued attraction of undesirable pastimes (criminality, betting, alcohol). While some museums sought to retain their aristocratic origins, others attempted to cater to the interests of the working classes. Museums can thus be said to have both reflected and influenced the cultural, social, political and economic enterprise of stabilisation, as one institution within the institutional framework which together make up the State, during a Victorian era that was alert to the challenges posed by the conditions of an unstable contemporary world.

The motley coalition in favour of free public museums: enlightenment or control?

5 Culture in Britain was one of the numerous fields where government support was initiated in response to philanthropic initiative and to radical politics. This explains both the variety of actors, from all classes, who were involved — politicians, artists, administrators, trustees, philanthropists, patrons and, as the century advanced, growing numbers from the working classes — and also the range of arguments put

forward in support of the case for the creation of public museums. Actions ranged from the lobbying for the adoption of legislation to the search for additional private funding (through patronage, subscriptions, fundraising), in an area where the State was reluctant to interfere, and even more reluctant to spend funds, backed by the prevailing public opinion on this point. In 1843, *Punch* criticized the offering of a free exhibition at *Westminster Hall,* on the grounds that subsidies should have been spent on the bare necessities of life: "The poor ask for bread, and the philanthropy of the State accords them — an exhibition."

"Substance and Shadow. Cartoon n° 1", *Punch*, vol. 5 (8 July 1843): 22

Source: Wellcome Collection, https://wellcomecollection.org/works/vdm7xc4h.

6 The drive for rational recreation, from the 1830s onwards, proves that Victorians were indeed concerned with the issue of poverty, but that they were also preoccupied with what, in relation to drinking, gambling, prostitution or "idleness", came to be termed "the problem of leisure" and its cultural, moral, economic and political consequences. While direct control was the realm of the State, charities initially were the most important actors in the internalization of dominant Victorian norms and values. These values were moral but were also political and economic: *laissez-faire* and self-help were as central as respectability, morality or temperance. For middle-class nonconformist philanthropists, "leisure activities should be controlled, ordered and improving", while social reformists argued that alternative leisure provision aimed at keeping the population away from undesirable pastimes was both more humane and more effective than coercion (Cunningham 129-30). The temperance movement and the Free Library Movement, which both started in the 1830s, drew together different strands prevalent among cultural reformists. There was no more consensus in evidence in relation to the precise content of these moral values than in relation to the political, social or moral values associated with arts and science collections. However, there was a clear endorsement of the goal of rational recreation as a prerequisite for political stability.

Museums were seen as effective instruments in the regulation of social behaviour, endowing visitors with capacities for self-enrichment and moral self-governance.

7 While contending that "museums were not alone in being summoned to the task of the cultural governance of the populace", Bennett rightly demonstrated that, contrary to other rational recreation facilities such as parks and libraries, museums gradually became the site of a powerful nexus of interrelated rationales, systematically including the economic dimension, while epitomising middle-class aspirations for a stable Victorian society and politics:

- Taste was a moral as well as an aesthetic concept. Many philanthropists and civic reformers presumed, following Edmund Burke or later John Ruskin, that art and virtue were linked. The opposite was also true: the lack of taste was equated with the lack of a moral sense. The elevation of popular taste for the arts was also hailed as a means to improve industrial design.
- Education was a personal benefit, which also answered to political and economic objectives. Better-educated people would sustain social order and allow for a more competitive economy.
- Socialising ("civilising") allowed for the inculcation of middle-class social norms, through the imitation and support for the basic values of British society, thereby ensuring social control. Moral and political stability went hand in hand.
- The goal of diminishing the appeal of non-rational pastimes was considered desirable on moral grounds, health grounds (alcohol, sexually transmitted diseases), social grounds (to combat poverty and criminality) and economic grounds (to increase the productivity of workers) (Bennett; Woodson Boulton).

8 Given such a variety of potential virtues, museums began to be presented as the legitimate and much needed sites for public action, their utility going beyond the vague sphere of philanthropy, with the result that the arguments enumerated here came to be put forward to support the case for legislation.

Political reform and indirect museum support

9 The museum question came to prominence as a result of the shift in power brought about by the 1832 Reform Act, which admitted the middle classes in the parliamentary system, resulting in an increased number of reformist and philanthropist MPs. The various proponents ranged from James Silk Buckingham (1786-1855, radical MP for Sheffield 1832-37), Benjamin Hawes (1797-1862, Whig MP 1832-51), to William Ewart (1798-1869, a Liberal MP elected almost continuously in the period 1828-68). The political defence of rational recreation took both indirect and direct forms: either invoked in the discussion of issues relating to undesirable social practices, whether alcohol consumption or political rebellion, or directly addressed, in the call for the increased provision of museums: "Visiting art galleries became one of the privileges and duties of the citizen." (Taylor, XIII) The question of museum reform in Parliament placed significant stress on its implication for commerce and for prestige. Thus from the very birth of the modern museum, the arguments in support of its expansion were based on a multifaceted instrumentalism, where the museum as a site of socialisation, by way of the display of its collections, could be promoted as an instrument conducive to a range of complex and positive social ends. The continuum of rationales in support of museums also reflected the fact that advocates used the arguments which they felt

would have the strongest impact, not necessarily those which they believed in most. Humanists in particular often used utilitarian and religious arguments, museums thus being presented as "an antidote to drunkenness, an alternative to riot, or an instrument for civilising the morals and manners of the population." (Bennett 21-2)

10 In the wake of the 1830 Beer Act, James Silk Buckingham persuaded MPs to appoint a Parliamentary committee on "the extent, causes and consequences of the prevailing vice of intoxication among the labouring classes." It was dominated by the Evangelicals and reflected the concerns of the temperance movement. Dubbed the "Drunken Committee" by critics, it did not arouse much interest on party grounds. The report contended that the control of drinking should lie within the responsibilities of the State and that rational recreation, and notably museums, should be supported so as to compete with the tavern, thus promoting sobriety and the industriousness of workers. Buckingham's view was that men did not visit the public-house for "the love of the drink" but through the need for "cheerful and friendly intercourse [...with] fellow men." The approach was considered "ridiculous" by *The Times*, while *The Spectator* reported, "It is, indeed, a melancholy truth, that the Members of the House of Commons roared with laughter during the reading of some parts of the Report."[1]

11 The northern influence within the temperance movement explains why, on the contrary, Sheffield and Leeds newspapers empathised with the report's benevolent recommendations, which were, according to Harrison, "imaginative [and] less sectarian than those later embraced by most temperance reformers", staying clear of prohibition and coming down in favour of action on the quantity and quality of the drinking and leisure on offer: "still more far-sighted [...] were the report's positive proposals for public leisure amenities". This, along with a utopian planning project announcing garden cites, caused Harrison to identify Buckingham as an "ancestor of the Welfare State. (Harrison 272-300). While the three successive bills presented by Buckingham were unsuccessful, his acknowledgement of environmental reasons for drunkenness (isolation, poverty, repetitive jobs) and of the need for public recreation were shared by some teetotaller chartists, by a number of eminent figures of the century (Owen, Engels, Rowntree, Booth...), but also by members of the working class (Jennings 129-30, 161-3) and by Joseph Hume, a radical philanthropist, who somewhat exaggerated the success of public recreation in London, declaring during the debates on the 1845 Museum Bill: "the people had deserted the public houses, preferring to visit places where they could improve their minds."[2]

12 The alleged superior "elevating" power of the arts meant they were sometimes dealt with in isolation from science museums and libraries. In 1841 Benjamin Hawes (1797-1862) chaired a Select Committee, whose members included public culture supporters such as Peel, Hume and Ewart, on the need for a Royal Fine Arts Commission to oversee decoration of the new Houses of Parliament, set up later that year. Though dominated by the 1830s rationale in accordance with which the arts were regarded as competitive assets through which to support national prestige and industry, Hawes also underlined their beneficial educative and moral influence: "the promotion of the fine arts can be considered [...] as a means [to] the civilisation of our people; to give to their minds a direction which may tend to withdraw them from habits of gross and sensual indulgence."[3]

13 Rational recreation was also invoked as a way to counter political unrest. The limited franchise granted within the terms of the 1832 Reform Act, coupled with the

implications of the 1834 New Poor Law, were factors contributing to the alienation of the working classes and thus to the rise of the Chartist movement, orchestrated around three great petitions and mass demonstrations (1839, 1842, 1848) that were repressed by widespread imprisonment and deportation. The petitions, especially the last one, caused great concern in government circles and among the propertied classes, who feared a revolution. They therefore chose to assume responsibilities for the public administration of leisure, thereby endorsing the assumption that leisure could or should be instrumentalised, to prevent riot and sedition by keeping the working classes occupied and content, away from political activity. In 1840, for instance, during the celebrations marking the wedding of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, Edwin Chadwick and the Chief Commissioner of police convinced the mayor of Manchester to open the parks, the museum and the zoo in order to draw people away from the Chartist meeting, which, it was expected, would otherwise have turned into a demonstration (Taylor 65-6).

Legislating for public Museums

14 In the midst of Chartist unrest, and while most working-class men were still excluded from the franchise, the 1832 Reform, by enlarging the number and profile of voters, paved the way for the modernisation of local government. This, coupled with the 1835 Municipal Corporations Act expanding local powers, reduced the room for corruption, while diversifying the social background of those elected to municipal office. More dedicated reformers and philanthropists entered local politics and were thus in a position to use their civic authority to spread the values they believed in, such as temperance, education, self-help, faith and charity. Their social and moral values were often associated with a democratic ideal and with utilitarian views. This was especially the case amongst industrialists from the north, such as Robert Owen, who shared the general objective of promoting the happiness for the majority through social, rational and industrial reform based on a new and more egalitarian model of society. Some mayors and municipal politicians became active in the field of museums, in association with the temperance or the library and museum movement, which organised exhibitions, gathered funds and lobbied for increased intervention, to be justified in terms of the new role taken on by museums as public institutions (Carré 68-73, 95). This diverse coalition of actors, along the lines of the "Liberals" in Parliament which brought together whigs, radicals and Peelites (from 1846), before the Liberal party assumed in 1859 its recognisable Victorian and Edwardian contours, enabled Museum reform to gather pace.

15 The general framework for museum reform was significantly advanced by the voting of legislation (1845, 1850 and 1855 Libraries and Museum Acts). Nevertheless, there remained widespread differences in implementation, insofar as policy regarding museums was legally dependent on a local initiative and a vote. Indeed, whereas there was a consensus on the need for such institutions, the 1850 Library and Museum Bill met with widespread opposition in Parliament from the Conservatives, who were both alarmed at the cost implications of the scheme and at the social transformations it might effect. Its adoption followed a second period of campaigning which was representative of the Museum movement, as it was led jointly by two Liberal MPs, William Ewart and Joseph Brotherton, and by the Chartist Edward Edwards — a former

bricklayer who had educated himself in the libraries of the Mechanics' Institute. The Act led to a rapid increase in the number of museums in Britain (see below).

16 In order to interpret the symbolic power associated with museums, in the debates at the end of the unstable 1830s and 1840s, Foucault's theories constitute a useful interpretative grid. In Foucaldean terms, the modern State is characterised by the convergence of a specific set of rationalities, practices and techniques designed to govern and organise the conduct of the individual citizen, as a component of a political and civil collective. While classical sovereignty was defined by the ruler's appropriation of the right of death on its subjects, modern power was definable in terms of all the relations which were active in the discipline and control of the social body. Modern museums, within the framework of a liberal polity, were thus to be regarded as a rational and effective instrument of "governmentality", articulating power and knowledge. They were based on educational specialisation and classification, whereas, previously, collections had displayed curiosities and ornaments:

> Museums and Libraries are heterotopias where time never ceases to pile up [...] until the end of the seventeenth century, museum and libraries were the expression of an individual choice. By contrast, the idea of accumulating everything, the idea of establishing a sort of general archive, the will to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes, the idea of constituting a place of all times that is itself outside of time, and inaccessible to its ravages, the project of organizing in this way a sort of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in a place that will not move — well, all this belongs to our modernity. (Foucault 2008: 20)

17 Drawing on Foucault, Bennett has developed one of the most enlightening new museological readings of Victorian museum reform. He argues that the transition epitomised by these new public institutions ran parallel to that of scientific progress and democratic reform: "the development of bourgeois democratic policies required not merely that the populace be governable, but that it assent to its governance, thereby creating a need to enlist active popular support for the values and objectives enshrined in the State". In a liberal government dominated by Victorian ethics, museums were agents of an overall strategy aimed at producing a form of citizenship resting on self-regulation rather than on coercion. Museums became central spaces through which to foster such relations and were thus constructed as social spaces of representation, observation and regulation of the norms of behaviour (Bennett drew on Foucault 1977 and 1978, in Bennett 1-14, 89). From Bennett's perspective, museums were material and symbolic representations of State power "to show and tell":

> If the museum and the penitentiary thus represented the Janus face of power, there was none the less, at least symbolically, an economy of effort between them. For those who failed to adopt the tutelary relation to the self promoted by popular schooling or those whose hearts and minds failed to be won in the new pedagogic relations between State and people symbolized by the open doors of the museum, the closed walls of the penitentiary threatened a sterner instruction in the lessons of power. Where instruction and rhetoric failed, punishment began.

18 Bennett also contrasted museums to other heterotopias, notably those of popular culture, characterised by a limited timespan and associated with irrationality, disorder and instability, such as festivals, fairs, circuses, pleasure gardens or even cabinets of curiosities, but also international exhibitions (Bennett 87-8).

The Great Exhibition: displaying Victorian progressivism and stability?

19 Saville has shown how the legacy of the Great Exhibition was used to counterbalance other less consensual turning-points in the mid-19th century, in particular Chartist troubles — which incidentally also took place in Hyde Park — even though they had only been a weak echo of the European revolutionary movements of the period. He did, however, acknowledge that the Great Exhibition constitutes a more appropriate marker through which to plot the transition from the radicalism and agitation of the 1840s. 1848 can thus be taken as the emblem of an era of agitation, while the Exhibition came to reflect the dominant context of the liberal 1850s and 1860s during which class conflict was subsumed, through the improvements in economic and educational conditions (Saville 205-8), in turn associated with increased popular interest in exhibitions and consumption.

20 Purbrick has rightly identified why the Exhibition came to be the landmark in most periodisations used in Victorian historiography, regardless of the field, opening " nineteenth-century histories as if it was a revolution, a coronation, the last year of the war or the first of a Parliament." Not only was the Exhibition associated with a narrative of success on all fronts (commercial, logistical, cultural, technological...), it was also considered as a vanguard, emblematic instance of modernity, with its functionalist approach to buildings, collections, to economics as well as to politics (Purbrick 1-25), all epitomised in a commodified and global event, fusing national production, consumption and the general public within an idealised promotion of the industrial world. The event was physically embodied by a building, the Crystal Palace, a utopian museum space presenting both unique artefacts and reproducible manufactured commodities. For most commentators at the time, the Exhibition was a resounding proof that the British model of government, based on collaborations with charities, on industrial development and free trade, was conducive to social progress, political stability and to international peace (Black 36-7).

21 Museum scholars concur on the pivotal role of the 1851 Great Exhibition in the emergence of a conception of modern museums as instruments of stability, albeit with certain variations in the interpretations, ranging from admiration to a critical deconstruction of the designs thus pursued. Golby and Meikle (19) enthusiastically contended that the Exhibition was "a wonderful occasion for fusing recreation with instruction, thereby improving the lot and the minds of the working class." Indeed, although the Great Exhibition was not primarily organised as an event for workers, a committee was set up to cater for their needs, thus explaining the total of 6 million visitors who actually attended it. A leaflet was printed to inform them how to dress and behave. Queen Victoria, in her correspondence, admitted her amazement at the orderliness of the working-class public. The latter was mostly composed of artisans, however, who had already been socialized through the routines and disciplines of charities, workers' associations or excursion clubs. Indeed, Mechanics' Institutes had already been organising modestly priced exhibitions allowing for the evening attendance of workers. These were the pioneers of the modern public museums and the extension of their opening hours (Bennett 72-3, 100). London museums benefited from the Exhibition's crowds: in the short term, visits increased (the British Museum received more than two million visitors in 1851, more than the entire population of

central London), while in the longer term, open door policies were consolidated (Altick 467).

22 While most researchers describe the project of the Exhibition as a middle-class one, Gurney has analysed the appropriation of the Crystal Palace by the working class as a space for recreation with the help of the Cooperative Movement and some temperance organisations, although the content was closer to consumer culture rather than to voluntary culture. James Cook, a temperance worker who devised educative package tours as an alternative to undesirable leisure, took 165,000 visitors to the Great Exhibition, thus setting in motion the trend to mass tourism. The Exhibition was also, according to Gurney, an opportunity to celebrate the technical achievements of workers and to highlight the possibility of class mobility through education. If the Exhibition did not modify class relations overnight, as some narratives suggest, class conflict in its 1830s and 1840s revolutionary form faded, replaced by a sustained pressure from the respectable working classes for greater public action in the fields of urban provision and culture (Gurney 128-40). Inconsequence, for Auerbach (1999), rather than merely symbolising peace, progress and prosperity, the Great Exhibition can be regarded as an opportunity given to the proponents of what were different visions of industrialisation and modernity to fight for a new national identity, grounded in the cultural rather than the political field.

23 The Exhibition was a landmark in the development of a public exhibitionary complex, leading to the construction of museum institutions as social regulators, instruments in the production of unified and reproducible narratives and iconographies of the Nation, as such preferable to coercion, and that were to be socially effective in a more stable climate (Purbrick 1, 8-9). Bennett identified social stability as the shifting paradigm of museums in the mid-Victorian era: “The exhibitionary complex was a response to the problem of order [...] seeking to transform that problem into one of culture: a question of winning hearts and minds as well as the disciplining and training of bodies”, where civil society, industry and the State turned their efforts to the control of working-class culture.” (Bennett 62) The success of the Exhibition in strengthening pride through the affirmation of British industrial and cultural power, while also proving the working classes’ capacity for good behaviour and their interest in instruction, was instrumental in subsequent campaigns for further legislative and policy action.

Institutionalising the modern museum

24 The 1851 Exhibition’s Trust made use of the commercial profits it had reaped by helping to found the South Kensington Museum (1852-1857), placed under the responsibility of a new governmental Department of Science and Art and, until 1873, directed by Henry Cole (1808-1882), a colourful and combative character. His extraordinary career as a museum administrator was influenced by utilitarianism and free trade, as he had been self-educated in the group of radicals around John Stuart Mill and was active all his life in the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce. He was the driving force behind not only the 1851, 1862 and 1871-74 Exhibitions, but also the promotion of Museum legislation and the creation of museums in London and in the provinces. The number of museums increased nationally from a mere dozen in 1800 to almost 60 in 1850, and to at least 240 in 1887 (Bonyton and Burton 1-10, 178-9; Pearson 45-6).

25 The creation of the Department of Science and Art signalled the beginning of a fully-fledged framework of State support for a modern institution, both administratively and in terms of the objectives pursued. Indeed, the South Kensington Museum was the first in Britain to be public. From its inception it was directly managed by the State rather than by a Trust (a model which survived). It was also the first museum in the world to actively encourage visits from workers by fitting gas lightings in order to allow for after-work visits and by opening a restaurant with three different menus, at prices affordable for most customers. The policy, subsequently developed elsewhere, proved very popular, since fifteen million visitors passed through its doors between 1857 and 1883, including six million evening visitors (Altick 500).

26 Cole's Memoirs (1884) shed light on his unique role, not only as a civil servant but also as a social reformer representative of his times. His biographers rightly criticise the selective quotes in Bennett's work, which tend to present Cole as being disrespectful to the working classes. They generally agree, however, that Cole considered museums as instruments to an end: "He created and manipulated institutions, so that they exercised social control, and embodied, endorsed and promoted certain values. [...] He was indubitably progressive, prescient of modern attitudes in his customer-oriented policies; and his amiable view stand out well in the face of much modern thinking on museums, which sees them as sites for social regulations." Understanding Cole's wish to replace elite tastes, whether dictated by the aristocracy or artists, by a larger middle-class appeal can enable us to overcome the perceived contradiction between his authoritarian attitude in matters of taste and his positive social policies (Bennett 102; Bonyton and Burton 6-8), or his ingenious curating and museological initiatives aimed at the promotion of a quality "visitor experience", notably for the working classes and students.[4] He was, furthermore, a worthy exemplar of Pearson's "soft approach" to the role of the Victorian State in the promotion of culture, citizenship and order, avoiding the recourse to constraint, working "by example rather than by pedagogy; by entertainment rather than by disciplined schooling; and by subtlety and encouragement." (Pearson 35)

27 If museums were increasingly seen as democratic entities, the policy priorities and the justifications put forward for the Department of Science and Art's finances were instrumental: questions of social order, aesthetics, education and market economy were linked in the promotion of "design reform." The improvement in the quality of British design, through exhibitions dedicated to the decorative and applied arts that were to lead to an improvement in the proficiency in drawing, and through the lending of artefacts upon demand from local museums, was a stated intention (Cole 366). Visual literacy and cultural capital were regarded as being more central than literacy for the new manual workers in the field of industrial design (Quinn). As Kriegel has noted: "labor supplied the language, criteria and priorities for waging the culture war for the mid-Victorian era." The pressure for the emergence of a museum culture should not then be exclusively seen in terms of social order. It should also be envisaged through the interconnected lens of British global competitiveness in design and manufacturing (Kriegel 159, 174-5).

28 However influential the new museology and cultural theory readings have been for the identification of the general exhibitionary complex in the Victorian era, it is essential to differentiate clearly between the various types of museum that emerged during the period, in line with specific chronologies. In this way it is possible to differentiate

between London and the provinces and to highlight questions of governance (rather than governmentality), which was sometimes a bottom-up, horizontal or participatory policy process. Museums in London, for instance, were under the influence of their different administrators. Their models conform to what is a general pattern: from the aristocratic British Museum, to the elitist National Gallery, to the modern South Kensington and to its popular Bethnal Green branch. These developments can be contrasted with those in municipalities outside the capital city, which produced a somewhat different model, in which civic power was fused with local aspirations.

29 While Parliamentary committees and charities sought to draw on the provisions of museum legislation to promote the edification of the working classes in middle-class mores, some museum trusts and officials strove to retain an aristocratic or elitist model, in keeping with the aristocratic names of their collections or the erudite guide books they produced (Grewal 48). As Cole's creation, the South Kensington museum was characterised from the start by its openness in terms of public access and its support for the bourgeois cultural canon: handcrafts and industrial objects were foregrounded as examples of good design, on a par with their presentation as works of art, alongside the museum's fine arts pieces. The British Museum, by contrast, proved reluctant to attract workers and only opened in the evenings in 1883. It was substantially expanded through public funding and its natural history department was moved to new premises in South Kensington to create the Natural History Museum in 1881, on lines closer to the South Kensington model. In 1885 the latter separated its Science and Design collections to create two distinct institutions (Bennett 71). During the 1880s, the curating of London museums and the framework for their overall administration gradually converged, enabling them to adapt to new audiences while reinforcing their scientific specialization.

Local and Municipal Museums as agents of stability?

30 Although the inauguration in 1872 of a new museum marked the first visit in two hundred years by royalty to Bethnal Green, the press, then and later, depicted the locals as degenerate people who appeared unfit to benefit from the museum. In 1884, the writer Walter Besant was severe in his assessment of the failures of London museums to attract the poorer working class, burdened as they were by material hardships and in need of tuitional mediation: "The Bethnal Green Museum does no more to educate the people than the British Museum. It is to them simply a collection of curious things which is sometimes changed. It is cold and dumb." On the contrary, Besant praised the appeal to those with a wish to learn, mainly artisans, of the voluntary multi-activity Toynbee Hall, set up by Samuel Barnett, an Anglican priest and Christian socialist reformer (Kriegel 182; Besant 342-53).

31 The initial project of Bethnal Green was, as Kriegel notes, an example of "design reform from below. If the working man would not come to South Kensington, South Kensington would come to the working man." This had been welcomed locally, as parts of the working classes had become "cultural consumers and political subjects." The relative failure was therefore not necessarily due to the museum's focus on the "relevant and the improved," which met the expectations of some workers. It was rather to be explained in terms of the lack of sufficient management, mediation and the quality of collections — the place being dubbed the "asylum for South Kensington

refuse." Local people wishing to donate small objects were tactlessly turned away and Sir Richard Wallace saved the museum's reputation by consenting a large loan (painting, porcelain and furniture), that was completed by exhibitions praising Victorian industrial and scientific success (local trade, industrial production, design, medicine, hygiene, sewage systems). Kriegel ultimately concludes that Bethnal Green was quite popular with external middle-class visitors and local artisans, but that, contrary to its intended purpose of social disciplining, what it provided was a space for civic pride, sociability or self-display, thus attenuating somewhat the overall interpretation of exhibitionary institutions as instruments of social control. Sources concur with Black's view that the museum was successful in the more humble objective of offering some competition to the public house during evening hours and bank holidays (Kriegel 162, 178-87, 198; Black 33-4).

32 Cultural power tended to become more widely shared locally, as organisations were obliged to lobby for funding. The resulting institutions, under the influence of the local Council, usually took into account the tastes, interests and leisure patterns of their public. In order to get the 1850 Museum Bill through Parliament, William Ewart had to agree to a number of compromises: local referendums would have to show the approval of at least two-thirds of ratepayers, while local rates could be increased by no more than a halfpenny in the pound to pay for the service. Although the sum was increased to one penny in 1855, it remained insufficient. Projects were therefore heavily dependent on donations and on voluntary subscriptions, notably from working men's committees. The 1877 Museums Act retained the requirement for local approval, albeit through a simple majority vote in a poll or a public meeting of ratepayers (Waterfield). Regarding policy-making, certain unintended effects could occur, and in this case, the initial framework of anti-interventionism and conservative restrictions had a positive impact on the democratic process, fostering bottom-up participation, encouraging local appropriation and ultimately leading to popular success. David Chadwick noted that, in 1856, Salford Museum (the first municipal museum opened in 1850 within the terms of the 1845 Act) attracted twice as many visitors as the British Museum, notably because it opened in the evenings.

33 Municipal museums established in cities such as Glasgow, Leeds, Salford, or Nottingham also reflected their specific social contexts, as the examples of two local patrons and the campaigns to house budding collections– the Walker Gallery in Liverpool (1877) and the Harris Museum in Preston (1893)– illustrate. The benefactors subscribed to the common view that their trusts would enforce social control, restore community cohesion and develop education, aims regarded as desirable for society's well-being. Edmund R. Harris (1803-1877), the son of a vicar, was a discreet solicitor who bequeathed his entire fortune for charitable and educational purposes, "as the Trustees would seem most needed." Andrew Barkley Walker (1824-1893) had a very different agenda: he was trying to secure a better reputation, as his business as a brewer had alienated some local people, notably members of the Temperance Movement. In response to the movement's call for an art gallery, and even though Walker had no particular interest in art, he donated funds during his lifetime in order to mark his time as Mayor (Doustaly 2007: 79-90).

34 Museums helped redefine the interaction between a local council and public life, thus contributing to the reimagining of industrial cities. Along with other cultural amenities, cities started to compete through their museums in the adornment of city

centres, in accordance with a policy motivated by designs that involved goals of social control and moral improvement as well as civic pride. They thus embodied a modern governmental approach. In designing their collections, galleries took account of the local tastes for contemporary figurative British painters, neglecting old masters, in opposition to Eastlake's curatorship at the National Gallery in London. For Woodson-Boulton, the period epitomised the dominant "conception of museums as a public good and of museums as spaces that could offer all of the moral and aesthetic refuge of the middle-class home" and a protection from the industrial alienation deplored by Ruskin. These domesticated public spaces took on specific forms in industrial cities that were endowed with rich collections of Victorian painting, notably Liverpool, Birmingham and Manchester (both opened in 1883). Their success was impressive: in 1891, the Walker Gallery attracted an attendance equal to the total population of Liverpool (around 500,000); Manchester, with a similar census-recorded population, could boast an attendance of around 300,000. These figures imply widespread appeal, even if bulk museum statistics always need to be qualified, as they also correspond to multiple visits by some members of the public. As today, event management strategies were devised in order to attract more visitors. These included social events, free drinks on Sundays and temporary autumn exhibitions, which proved very popular in the 1880s. Municipal museums therefore sought to appeal to different tastes and to people of different means, even if the result was to discriminate between classes (Woodson-Boulton 1, 12, 59, 152).

35 Waterfield (2015) has minutely documented the chronology of the emergence of municipal museums as popular places of civic culture, arguing that it was only when their popular appeal weakened and as they were professionalised at the end of the 19th century that their curating became more conservative, not earlier.

The success of rational recreation in the face of religious controversy

36 After the "heydays of rational recreation" in the 1830s and 1840s (Cunningham 129-30), in reaction to the association between popular leisure and a dangerous instability, the second period, opened by the Great Exhibition was marked by the acceptance in public opinion that leisure was "a necessary amenity, a basic overhead in the maintenance of an industrial society". During the period, the aspirations of working-class men were better represented, notably by the passing of two further Reform Acts (1867, 1884), leading to a less didactic approach to leisure (Bailey 94). Although recent museology tends to analyse rational recreation as social control, through the succeeding decades of the Victorian era it increasingly came to be perceived at the State level as a factor of social progress for the working classes, part of a more general trend towards social meliorism.

37 Although the funds which charities drew on mostly came from the traditional elites, it was the middle classes who played an active role within them, and whose values and tastes proved most influential, along with women, who became more active both as organisers and as visitors to museums (Parratt). Reasons for support remained intertwined and partly contradictory, in an evolving urban, religious and political context: the duty of charity was reaffirmed, in response to the influence of new religious trends and out of an awareness of a widening gap and geographical

segregation between the poor and the rich, combined with fears of disorder. In the 1880s, concerted efforts were made to re-establish social links with poorer neighbourhoods. London's East End, located at the heart of the capital, epitomised these new anxieties. Philanthropists regretted the lack of local social leadership, as business owners increasingly moved out, choosing to live at some distance from the location of their factories and from their workers' dwelling-places. As Beaven notes, rational recreationists were divided into two strands: some strove to expose the working classes to high culture, while others still attempted to impose moral order and to fight popular pastimes, "uncivilized leisure", constructed as a threat (Beaven 28-33).

38 The Labour movement, and indeed some charities, notably the Salvation Army which was very popular in the 1880s and 1890s, were in agreement that leisure was a "dangerously open-ended world", which needed to be controlled, opposing the deserving to the undeserving poor. Bailey has documented how little popular culture was in any sense understood, and how attempts to promote rational recreation often failed to attract the very category it was intended for. Parts of the Temperance Movement, which had fragmented since the 1830s, became allied with Sabbatarian organisations, notably with the most important among them, the Lord's Day Observance Society (1831-1860s), opposing all kinds of Sunday recreation, including museums. While they enjoyed scant support within Parliament, they were a well-organised lobby, producing numerous petitions, campaigning against Sunday or evening opening of museums or against the exhibition of works deemed immoral (partially naked scenes in particular, even when they were religious). They managed to postpone by fifteen years the opening of the British Museum and the National Gallery on Sundays, until a more liberal Law was eventually promulgated in 1896. Paradoxically, they never dared oppose the opening of pubs on Sundays (Bailey 31; Vervaecke 139).

39 In this context, the onus was on museums to prove their positive influence. One of the assessments to be invoked was a House of Commons committee report, which concluded in 1860 that the South Kensington Museum had been successful in the encouragement of temperance, since only one person had been excluded for drunkenness since it had opened. Statistics proudly estimated an average consumption per person of 2,5 drops of wine, 14/15th of a drop of brandy, 10,5 drops of beer (Altick 500)! The cross-reading of Cole's memoirs and of his speeches points to the fact that he genuinely believed in the capacity of museums to compete with the pub, provided they offered a bar, as did South Kensington. In a long 1875 address, he regretted the British slowness to recognise museums as civilising forces:

> If you wish to vanquish Drunkenness and the Devil, make God's day of rest elevating and refining to the working man. [...] As he cannot live in church or chapel all Sunday [...], open all museums of science and art after the hours of divine service, let the working man get his refreshment there in company with his wife and children rather than leave him to booze away from them in the Public House and Gin Palace. The museum will certainly lead him to wisdom and gentleness, and to Heaven, whilst the latter will lead him to brutality and perdition. (Cole 367-8)

40 In studying cultural practices, it is essential to analyse the extent to which the public managed to adapt a top-down cultural offer, reappropriating it in terms of their own expectations.

41 Reasons for the presence of working-class visitors in the museum were varied, as was pointed out in sketches and reports from the period: some were attracted by the free

novelty, by works of art depicting violence, sex or flesh; some simply wanted to keep warm in winter or to observe the other classes. Contrary to widespread expectations, this did not mean they necessarily emulated middle-class manners afterwards. Neither were these "masses" homogeneous, which implies the crucial importance of the differentiations to be drawn between the various sections of working-class visitors. Although comprehensive statistics are lacking, it would appear that after the initial appeal of novelty had abated, and with the expansion in the range of leisure activities on offer, most museums went on to attract skilled artisans whose situation was close to that of the middle class, thereby playing an active role in the self-education of a social group that acquired cultural capital from their attendance. The success of State intervention is therefore a question which needs to be qualified, as, in comparison, exhibitions organised by voluntary or cooperative societies, such as Toynbee Hall, enjoyed a wider popular appeal amongst the working classes (Taylor 51-5, 75, 79, 122-4).

Conclusions

42 A series of factors explain the rapid development of modern museums, national or municipal, in the second part of the 19th century, and in particular the construction of museums as instruments of social stability, or "passionless reformers", as George Brown Goode wrote in his 1895 *Principles of Museum Administration* (Goode 71). Politically, museums were harnessed as instruments of cultural power, to be deployed towards citizens and also towards the rest of the world. The objectives of middle-class philanthropists and those of radicals converged at this point, however different the values motivating their participation in the overall enterprise: while the former tended mostly to adopt a religious and utilitarian approach, the latter viewed public institutions in more democratic terms (Crook 90).

43 While interpretations vary, there is an overall agreement that neither the enthusiasm of the general public for museums, nor the presumption as to their capacity for social control, were either all-encompassing or long-lasting. For Bennett, the permanent fairs that developed at the end of the 19th century contributed more directly and effectively to the mob's improved mores than did museums. Such a view tends to reduce the traditional opposition between these two heterotopias, deriving respectively from popular and high culture, a gap partly bridged by universal exhibitions (Bennett 3-5, 8), but also by the exhibitions hosted by charities, and to some extent through Henry Cole's policies of museum democratisation. It also confirms how modern the Victorians were, in terms of their more than burgeoning commodification of culture. This last feature challenges the idealised vision of the first museums as agoras where the various parts of the population mingled. During the late Victorian and Edwardian period, leisure, formerly a masculine sphere, both in terms of its regulation and its practice, began to concern women, as more upper-class and middle-class women became involved in philanthropic actions aimed at offering improving alternatives to the preferred amusements available to working class women, the pub and the music-hall (Doustaly 2012).

44 Although new museological approaches rightly focus on museums as sites of power, the deployment of social control through Victorian museums hardly fits into one single category or chronology. As is the case today, different institutions had different

curating, access and promotion policies, and even though at the beginning of the Victorian era museums were mostly supported by the State as instruments for the maintenance of political stability, various forms of cultural and economic instrumentalism were subsequently to develop, from cultural domination, consumption, luxury, tourism, to place branding. Any overall assessment regarding the power of museums or about their effects must not however be overstated, insofar as they reflect the contradictory tensions between the social, economic and political objectives:

> The successes and failures of these Victorian museums, their histories, reveal a tragic fact of the modern age: thriving cultural institutions such as city art museums arose out of the same wealth that caused or profited from, at least in part, the very inequalities they were meant to alleviate. We still cannot solve this basic conundrum. On the one hand, industrial capitalism and its attendant form of imperialism and globalization create vibrant cities, people, and cultural institutions, such as public museums. On the other, the same forces give rise to tremendous suffering, poverty, and conflict, ills that no art collection, regardless of size or quality, can hope to abolish. (Woodson-Boulton 6)

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NOTES

1. Buckingham (559-62) quoted in Harrison (280); House of Commons, 591 p. Hansard, 25, c. 963-70, 5 August 1834; *The Times*, 7 August 1834; *The Spectator*, 9 August 1834.
2. House of Commons, Debate 6 March 1845, vol. 78. cc387.
3. B. Hawes, Minutes of Evidence, 25 May 1841, House of Commons, *Report from the Select Committee on Fine Arts*, 18 June 1841, p. 18. See also p. V-VIII.
4. N. Smith: “Vertical Stands”, http://www.vam.ac.uk/blog/tales-archives/henry-coles-vertical-stands-early-display-cases-at-the-va. See also the other blogs from the Victoria and Albert Museum curators and archivists.

ABSTRACTS

This paper focuses on the different agents, whether public, private or voluntary, who in the Victorian Age campaigned in favour of the opening of public museums, whether national, local or municipal, and who invoked an intrication of cultural, political, social and economic rationales to muster support. In particular, these agents foregrounded the supposed capacity of museums to educate, pacify and control sections of the population considered as a threat to state stability. How were these objects of concern, i.e. the working classes, presented in the different discourses

and actions relating to museums, before and after their opening? The Victorian period was one of unstable, shifting social conditions in urban areas, characterised by an increased dynamic of urbanisation, coupled with neighbourhood segregation and related problems (criminality, betting, alcohol).These changes spurred the development of the rational recreation movement, whose support for the creation of public cultural institutions is examined here. The 1851 Exhibition is focused on, insofar as it provided a quite different exhibitionary complex and context, compared to that of museums. 1851 is identified as a turning point of the Victorian Era, involving as it did a shift away from the pacifying function, until then associated with museums. In conclusion, the article examines the factors which enabled these Victorian public museums to attract large number of visits from the working classes, in a context of enduring class distinction. The article draws on primary sources and also on established theories of social control, from that of Bailey (a leisure historian) and Bennett (who drew on Foucault's approach to apprehend the function of museums), but also on Parrat, Taylor, Kriegel, and, more recently, Jennings, Quinn, Purbrick and Woodson Boulton. The periodization, categorisation of actors, and the typology of museums proposed in this paper allows us to highlight the specific relevance of the conflicting theories regarding the role of museums.

Cet article s'intéresse aux différents acteurs, publics, privés ou associatifs, qui durant l'époque victorienne ont mené des campagnes en faveur de l'ouverture de musées, nationaux, locaux, municipaux, en s'appuyant sur un écheveau d'arguments culturels, politiques, sociaux et économiques,, en invoquant notamment la capacité supposée des musées à éduquer, pacifier, contrôler des pans de la population jugés instables, susceptibles donc de menacer la sécurité et stabilité de l'État. Comment était présenté cet objet d'inquiétude, c'est-à-dire la classe ouvrière, dans les différents discours et actions en lien avec les musées, avant et après leur ouverture ? La période correspond à une mutation des villes : accélération de l'urbanisation et de la ségrégation des quartiers, problèmes associés (criminalité, jeux d'argent, alcool), qui conduisent au développement d'un mouvement en faveur des loisirs censés être porteurs d'une visée moralisatrice. Le soutien manifesté pour la création d'institutions culturelles publiques est analysé ici en regard de celui attesté pour d'autres mouvements et associations. La Grande Exposition de 1851 est abordée, dans la mesure où elle établit un contexte expositionnel spécifique, différent de celui des musées. Le moment peut donc être identifié comme un tournant dans l'ère victorienne et dans le rôle pacificateur jusqu'alors associé avec les musées. Enfin, sont analysées les raisons pour lesquelles ces musées victoriens parviennent à attirer un grand nombre de visiteurs issus de la classe ouvrière, bien que les distinctions de classe restent opérantes. L'article s'appuie sur des sources primaires, sur les théories classiques sur le contrôle social : de Bailey (historien du loisir) et de Bennett (qui s'appuie sur les théories de Foucault, en les appliquant aux musées britanniques), mais aussi sur Parrat, Taylor, Kriegel, et, plus récemment, Jennings, Quinn, Purbrick and Woodson Boulton. La périodisation, la catégorisation des acteurs, la typologie des musées articulés dans l'article, permettent d'interroger et de tester la pertinence relative des théories divergentes quant au rôle assumé par les musées.

INDEX

Mots-clés: époque victorienne, musées, 1851 Grande Exposition, éducation, contrôle social, classes sociales, muséographie, patrimoine culturel, associations caritatives
Keywords: Victorian era, museums, 1851 Great Exhibition, education, social control, social classes, museography, cultural heritage, charities

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